

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

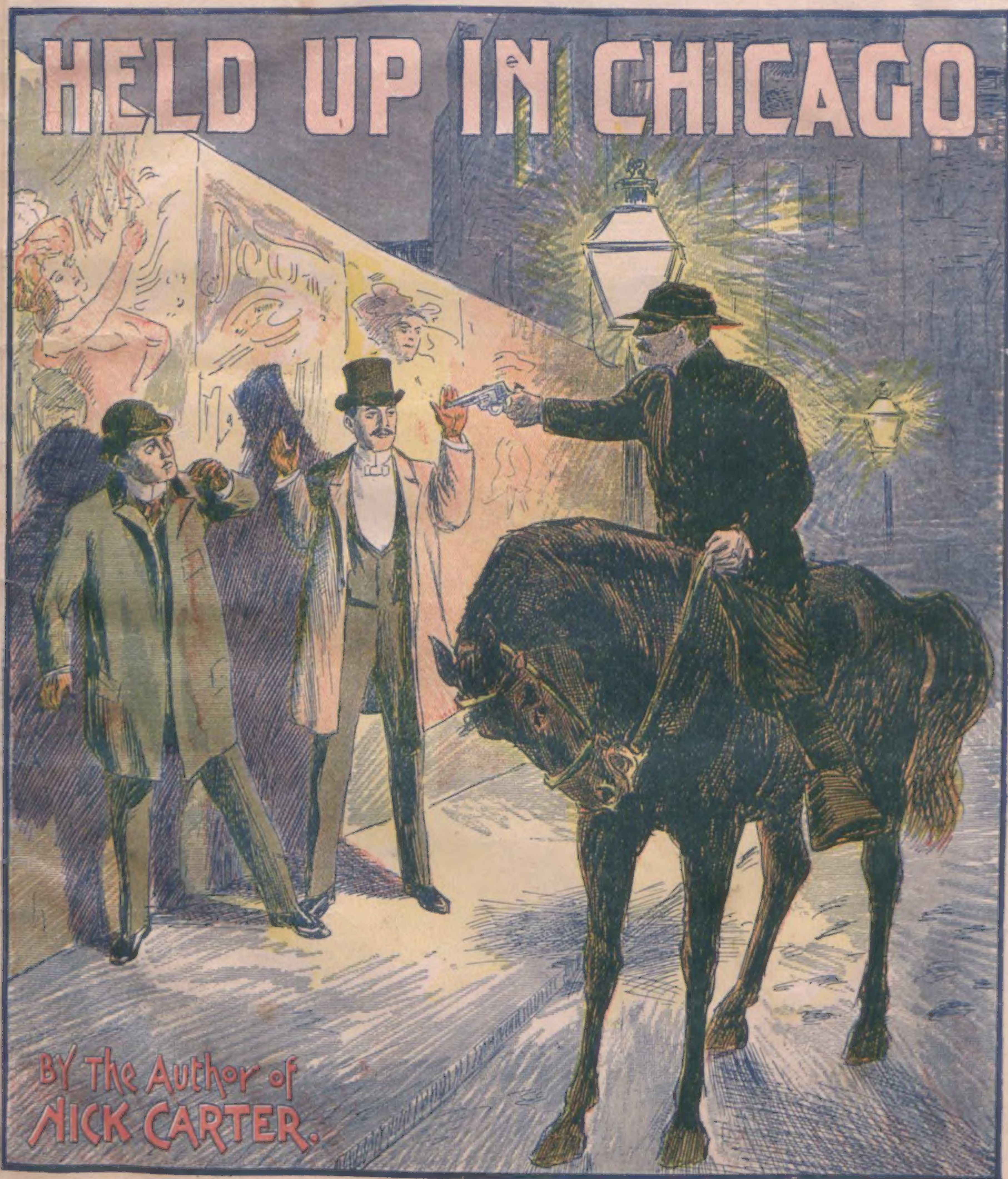
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HELD UP IN CHICAGO



BY THE AUTHOR OF
NICK CARTER.

THE HIGHWAYMAN SHOVED A REVOLVER WITHIN AN INCH OF THE YOUNG MAN'S FACE.

NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

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Held Up in Chicago

OR,

A New System of Keeping Books

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

A BOLD ROBBERY.

"Throw up your hands, young fellers!"

One of the two young men walking along Center street, in the city of Chicago, raised his daintily gloved hands with a laugh.

His companion turned deadly pale, and staggered back against the high fence inclosing the vacant lots on the south.

It was 10 o'clock in the evening, and the streets in that part of the city were practically deserted.

Footsteps were heard in the next block, rapidly advancing, but there was no one near the scene of the daring robbery.

"None of that," said the masked highwayman, forcing the horse he rode up to the sidewalk, "hand out your stuff here, or I'll put a bullet through your fool head."

"You won't get rich on my pile," said the

young man who had taken the first demand so lightly. "I was just wondering where I'd get car fare for the remainder of the week."

The highwayman paid no attention to the speaker.

He forced his horse close to the young man leaning against the fence, and shoved a revolver within an inch of his face.

"Out with it," he said.

The young man drew out a handful of change, and began releasing a gold chain from his vest.

With an oath the highway robber sprang from his horse, and, still holding the weapon in a threatening manner, proceeded to search the young man's pockets.

At length the robber drew a long yellow envelope from the inside pocket of the victim's coat and sprang away.

"Help! Help! Murder!"

As the masked man turned away the

young man who had been robbed drew a revolver from his pocket and fired.

The robber staggered for an instant, but was soon on his horse.

Then he turned in the saddle and fired at the man he had robbed.

"Help! Help!" shouted the victim again.

The footsteps in the next block quickened at the second cry, and several people rushed out of a saloon near at hand.

"He never touched me," laughed the first young man. "I never knew a highwayman to take a fellow's word before."

"I'll give a thousand dollars to the man that catches the thief," said the victim of the robbery. "He has ruined me!"

"Oh, come off, Fred Barnes," said the other. "What is a dollar or so to you now? You'll be a partner in the gilt-edged house of Wyman & Bliss to-morrow."

"You don't know what you're talking about, Jack Mather," said Fred Barnes, excitedly. "I——"

Before Fred could complete the sentence, some one seized him by the arm and walked him away from the little crowd which the cries and the shots had collected.

"Don't say a word until I have had a short talk with you," said the stranger.

"Who are you?" demanded Barnes.

"Never mind that now," was the reply. "I am not here to do you any harm."

"I refuse to speak until you tell me who you are."

The stranger whispered a few words in the young man's ear.

"Impossible," said the latter. "I never before heard of a detective being where he was wanted, and even you came up a moment too late."

"If you say another word I'll drop the case right here."

"For heaven's sake don't do that, Mr.

Carter," was the reply. "This is a matter which affects my whole life."

"Don't mention my name again," said the other. "How much did the robber get?"

"Twenty thousand dollars!"

"In bank-paper?"

"In bank-bills."

"Not another word here. Come with me to some quiet place."

"But I must report the matter to the police."

"I will attend to that."

"Shall I call my friend?"

"No."

But Jack Mather was not to be disposed of so easily.

When Fred Barnes and his new companion started away he followed on behind, and finally tracked them to a small room near the corner of Lincoln avenue.

"I suppose that's a detective," thought the young fellow, "and I'll just catch onto his racket. I think I'd make a good fly copper myself."

So, when the two men he was following sat down in a little room on the third floor of a handsome building a few blocks from the scene of the robbery, Jack Mather was not far away.

"I'm glad you happened to be in Chicago, Mr. Nick Carter," said Fred, "because I must have that money back."

"Tell me about it," said the detective.

"I work for Wyman & Bliss, manufacturers of jewelry."

"Yes."

"My father, long since dead, was a great friend of the head of the firm, and years ago it was arranged between the two men that I should become a partner in the house on my twenty-first birthday."

"Go on."

"Father lost most of his money before he died, but he kept twenty thousand dollars in

the bank for me to use for the purpose stated, that being the amount I was to put into the firm."

"I see."

"Well, I was twenty-one years of age to-day, and I went to the bank and got the money. I was foolish not to get a certified check, but I had a reason."

"Why didn't you pay it over?"

"Mr. Wyman did not come to the office, and Mr. Bliss was out of the city. The papers are all made out, and they will expect the money in the morning."

"It is a hard case."

"That man must have seen me draw the money. He didn't touch my partner."

"Who is the man who was with you?"

"Jack Mather, a clerk at the store."

"Does he know how much you lost?"

"No; he does not even know that I had the money with me."

"Then don't tell him."

"All right."

"Don't tell any one. Make some excuse to-morrow, and appear at the store just the same as usual."

"But there is one person who must be told."

The young man blushed as he spoke.

"Who is that?"

"Ethel Wyman."

"Why?"

"Our engagement is to be announced as soon as I become a member of the firm."

"Don't tell her. Keep away from her. This may seem strange advice to you, but will you act upon it?"

"Yes; I will do anything to get my money back."

"Then don't say a word about being robbed, and meet me here as soon as you leave the store to-morrow. I may have some news for you."

"I'm glad Mr. Bliss is out of town."

"Why?"

"I think sometimes he doesn't like me, on account of my being engaged to Ethel Wyman. I might have suspected him of the crime."

"Pshaw!" said the detective. "He may be a disappointed lover, but he is not a highway robber."

"But he knew that I was to take the money from the bank to-day. In fact, he asked me to pay in currency."

The detective started.

"I'll investigate him," he said, "but in the meantime, you must not say a word of this to any one."

"All right."

"You live on the North Side?"

"Within a block of where I was robbed."

"With your parents?"

"No; they are both dead. I board with Jack Mather's people."

"Well, keep your mouth shut."

The two men then left the room.

The next moment Jack Mather opened the door of the adjoining apartment and stepped out.

He had heard every word that had been said.

"What a blooming idiot that Barnes is, to take that man's word for everything," he mused. "I guess I'll have to take hold of this case myself. If that's Nick Carter, he's a queer-looking bloke."

When Jack got down to the sidewalk, young Barnes had disappeared, and a tall, muscular young fellow was ascending the stairs.

"I wonder if that fellow occupies the room I broke into?" thought Jack. "If he does, it's a good thing he didn't catch me there. He could do me up in about a second."

Jack listened until he heard the fellow

climb two pairs of stairs, and then he crept up and looked into the hall.

There was a light in the room he had just left.

"Got out just in time," he muttered.

Then he went down stairs and started toward home.

"That's funny about Mr. Bliss being thought of by Fred," he thought. "He's none too good to do the highwayman act if it would help him keep Fred away from Ethel Wyman. He wants her himself."

Jack walked west on Center street until he came to North Halsted, and then stopped for a moment to light a cigar.

"I wonder what Fred'll do without that money," he thought. "I'll bet a hundred it won't make a bit of difference with the girl. Funny the robber didn't go through me. He must have followed us all the way from town. Strange how he got onto Fred having the money. The boy didn't even tell me he had it."

As Jack stood thinking the matter over, a man passed him and went west on Center street.

The young man looked after him in amazement.

"Why," he thought, "that's the fellow who said his name was Nick Carter. He ain't following me, I hope."

"I think Fred must have hit the robber," went on the young man, "for he staggered. That fool of a detective never stopped to see if there was blood on the walk. Guess that's what he is going back for now."

Jack went on down the street and stopped on the corner opposite the scene of the robbery.

He heard some one moving along in the middle of the street.

A man was following along in the direction the robber had taken, and was making

a good deal of noise, but it was not the detective.

"If that's Nick Carter that I saw," thought Jack, "his friends ought to put him in an asylum before he ruins his fine reputation."

Jack crossed over to the spot where he had been stopped and bent down. There was blood on the snow.

When he looked up again there were two men in the middle of the road. One of them was the fellow who had gone into the room Jack had temporarily occupied while listening to the conversation.

"There's something queer here," thought the young man.

Then something bright on the walk attracted his attention, and he picked it up. It was a gold watch-key, with a tiny diamond in one end.

"Highwaymen don't carry tools like this," he thought, slipping it into his pocket. "I'll bet those men are hunting for some such clew as this, and I'll bet they don't get it."

He took the trinket from his pocket and put it in his shoe, where it was not likely to be found.

After watching the men for some minutes, Jack turned toward home, wondering how much of the detective's talk Fred would confide to him. In a moment he heard rapid footsteps in the rear, and turned hastily around. As he did so he received a blow on the head which brought him to his knees.

He cried out with all his might, but the next moment received a second blow which stretched him senseless on the walk.

The man who bent over him was the one he had seen going up stairs.

The fellow remained by the side of the fallen clerk until the sound of approaching footsteps warned him away.

Then he turned and ran.

When Jack regained consciousness he was in his own room.

CHAPTER II.

IN SEARCH OF A KEY.

One of the first faces Jack saw was that of Fred Barnes.

The poor fellow looked more like a ghost than a living man.

He seemed to have aged ten years since leaving the store.

"How did I get here?" asked Jack.

"You were found lying on the walk and were brought here," was the reply. "You must have got a hard knock."

"I remember now," said Jack. "Anything new about your case?"

"Not a thing. The people here are all talking about your case."

"It's a good thing you didn't have much of anything with you," said Jack, carelessly, ignoring the latter part of Fred's remark.

"Yes; very fortunate."

Fred turned away as he spoke.

Jack saw that his friend was determined to follow the instructions of the detective to the letter.

"That bump on the head doesn't make me feel any too good," said Jack, after a pause, "and I'm going to bed."

In a short time all was still in the house.

Then, when the lights were out, two men met in front of the building.

In a moment a close listener might have heard a key turning softly in the lock of the front door.

Then two men stepped into the little vestibule.

They paused and listened, but there was no sound anywhere in the house.

At the right and left were doors leading into the front rooms on the first floor.

In front was a door opening on a staircase.

This was soon opened, and the two men, after drawing masks over their faces, proceeded cautiously up the staircase.

"They are on the third floor," whispered one of the men, as his companion halted. "The stairs turn to the right there. Don't fall and break your neck."

A faint light was burning in the corridor on the third floor.

The two men walked softly to the front room on the right and turned the knob softly.

The door was locked, but the little pick-lock which had opened the lower door soon fixed that.

One of the young men turned uneasily in his sleep, and the foremost burglar brought forth a bottle of chloroform.

The atmosphere of the room was soon heavy with it. Then the burglars prepared for action.

They were soon in the room where Barnes and Mather were sleeping heavily under the influence of the drug.

"It's pretty thick here," said one of the men.

"I should say so," was the reply. "It will be a wonder if it don't kill the chumps."

"Raise the window; I'm smothering."

The window was raised, and the burglars proceeded to make a close inspection of the clothing lying on the floor and chairs, where the two sleepers had thrown their garments when disrobing.

"Here it is," said one of the men, at length. "I was certain that that was what he picked up."

"It's lucky we found it," was the reply. "It would have made no end of trouble."

"Yes; when gentlemen turn highwaymen, they ought to leave their fancy trinkets at home."

The burglars went softly down stairs, leaving the window open.

In the morning, when Fred awoke, he had a racking headache.

He dressed himself, with a heavy heart, and sat down by the front window.

"It's funny," he muttered, feeling in his pocket, "where my watch-key is. I am certain it was in my vest pocket last night."

"What's that?" asked Jack, sticking his head out from under the clothes.

"Can't find my watch-key."

"What was it like?"

"Gold, with a tiny diamond in the end."

"When did you have it last?"

"Yesterday morning."

Jack reached down and took something from his shoe.

"Try that," he said, throwing the key he had found toward his roommate. "I found it where we met the highwayman last night. I wonder if they got the adventure in the papers?"

"Say," said Fred, "don't say anything about it. The officers want to work on the quiet."

"Did you mention it in the house?"

"No."

"Well, you may be sure I didn't. I wasn't in shape to do much talking after I got that bang on the head. I suppose the house was all stirred up over that?"

"Of course."

"How's the watch-key?"

"It fits all right. I must have dropped it."

"Where did you get such a key?"

"It was a present from Mr. Wyman. Mr. Bliss received one like it at the same time."

"What's that?" cried the other, eagerly.

"Why, how you do pounce on a fellow! I spoke plainly enough."

"Mr. Bliss got one like it?"

"Yes."

"How many others got one like it?"

"No one. Only two were made."

Jack was dressed in about a minute.

"How funny this room smells," he said.

"Queer, too," said Fred, "when the window was open all night. You shouldn't leave it open."

"You opened it yourself."

"I certainly did not. I know now what this smell is like."

"What?"

"Chloroform."

Jack sprang to his feet with a bound.

"That's it," he shouted, "and that's what makes my head feel so."

"You must have been plow around the room in great shape during the night," said Fred, "for things were in a bad muss here when I got up, and the ends of burnt matches were scattered around on the carpet."

"I wasn't out of bed," replied Jack.

"It's funny about my watch-key," said Fred. "I am sure I had it here last night."

Jack was thinking fast in regard to that watch-key.

And he was puzzling over the odor of chloroform in the room.

He naturally put the two things together.

"And so Bliss had the other key, did he?" he thought. "That looks bad for Mr. Bliss."

Like all amateur detectives, Jack jumped at conclusions.

He thought that he had found out all there was to know about the case, and would have arrested Mr. Bliss at once, had he been clothed with police authority.

"Some one came into this room last night," he thought, "and got Fred's key, thinking it the one I found. I wonder what I'd better do?"

The young men went down to breakfast, but ate very little.

Fred was mourning over his loss, and Jack's head was full of great detective schemes.

"I can't go down to the store to-day," said

Fred, when the meal was over. "Tell them I am sick."

"You look sick," said Jack.

"I'll be all right to-morrow."

Jack took a car in front of the house and bought a morning paper.

Almost the first thing to attract his attention was a long account of the capture of a noted murderer, in New York, the day before, by the famous detective, Nick Carter.

Jack gave a low whistle of astonishment.

"They're giving poor Fred the double cross, I guess," he thought. "If Nick Carter was in New York yesterday, who was it that lugged Fred into that room and pumped him full of the idea that he must keep the size of his loss a secret?"

Another surprise awaited the young man at the office.

He was second clerk, and in the absence of the proprietors and Fred, attended to the mail.

A telegram from Mr. Bliss lay on his table.

He opened it and read:

"I am unavoidably detained in St. Louis. Communicate important matters by telegraph in the absence of Mr. Wyman."

"I guess I'll give up playing detective," thought Jack. "Here I was thinking all manner of hard things about Mr. Bliss a little while ago, and he wasn't even in town when the robbery took place."

In order to make sure that Mr. Bliss was actually in St. Louis, the young man sent a message regarding some firm matters, and received a prompt and satisfactory reply.

"Down goes the curtain on my detective drama," thought the young fellow, with a laugh.

At that moment Fred, looking very pale and excited, entered the office and began to pack up the things in his desk.

"What's up, old man?" demanded Jack.

"I'm going away."

"Pshaw! Get to work, and you'll feel better."

"I've been discharged."

"What?"

"Mr. Wyman ordered me out of his house, and told me never to enter the store again, except to get my things."

"What was the occasion of it?"

"Well, you see, I lost twenty thousand dollars last night, and I told Ethel about it this morning. Her father overheard the talk and accused me of gambling the money away. Then we had an awful row, and I got the run."

"I knew last night how much you lost."

"You did?"

Then Jack explained what had taken place, but said nothing about the watch-key incident, or at least what he had suspected regarding it.

"Couldn't you make the old man believe you?" he asked, in conclusion.

"No! he said that no man would keep a loss of that size a secret for a moment. He even thinks I got the man to rob me to cover up the fact that I had disposed of the money."

"But you can show by the bank that you drew the money yesterday."

Fred blushed.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I didn't draw it all yesterday. I have been drawing it right along for a month, and had only five thousand in bank yesterday."

"Why did you do that?"

"I was afraid something would happen to tie up the money when I wanted it, and so I kept drawing it out and hiding it away. I have been a fool in more ways than one."

"Sure you had it all last night?"

"Yes; every cent of it."

"Well, you're in hard luck. You can never square it with the old man, and the partnership and the girl go together."

"I suppose so. What shall I do now?"

"How much money have you got?"

"About a thousand."

"That's enough. You go home and stay until night. Then meet your detective, and hang onto him until he gets to the bottom of the affair. There's something more than a mere highway robbery back of all this."

Fred started away, but Jack called him back.

"Keep with your detective all you can," he said. "You may want him at any moment."

Fred went away wondering what was up, but said nothing.

Then Jack began to use the wire at the firm's expense. His first telegram read as follows:

"Mr. Nicholas Carter, New York:—You have a double, doing business under your name here."

He signed the firm's name to the message. In an hour an answer came back:

"What is the case?"

Jack answered:

"Highway robbery."

The great detective telegraphed back:

"I have been looking for that fellow for a long time. Will leave for Chicago on the first train. Will call at your place of business for details."

The electric correspondence ended with the following message from Jack:

"When you call at our place ask for Jack Mather."

Another surprise was in store for Jack that day.

Just as he was going to lunch a young man entered and presented a letter from Mr. Wyman.

The young man turned pale as he read it.

"In view of recent events," the senior partner wrote, "I think it best to have a rigid examination made of the books at the office. I am too ill to attend to this in person, but the bearer hereof, Mr. Samuel Ball, will assume

full charge until the return of Mr. Bliss, and will see that the work I have suggested is done."

Mr. Samuel Ball was not a pleasant-looking man.

There was a treacherous look in his black eyes, and his upper lip was too short and too ready to curl.

Jack arose from his desk.

"Very well," he said, "shall you need my services while the books are being investigated?"

"Certainly. Proceed with your work as usual."

Jack started for the door, on his way to lunch.

"Wait," said Ball, beckoning him back, "I want to speak to you in regard to the matter. Are you familiar with the books which show the daily sales? Like many large establishments, I see that this firm has a system of bookkeeping of its own."

Jack answered in the affirmative.

"Who kept those books?"

"Mr. Barnes."

"Do you want to make some extra pay?" asked Ball.

"Certainly."

"Then take the books I have mentioned home with you every night until you have itemized their contents."

"I don't understand," said Jack.

"I want to know how many charms, how many rings, how many chains, and so forth, the books account for," was the reply.

"That's a fool scheme, too."

Jack did not make the remark until he was out of the office and out of the hearing of Mr. Ball.

As the young man walked down the street he realized that he was being followed.

He wandered aimlessly about for some moments, but the "shadow" did not lose sight of him for an instant.

"Well," thought the young man, "I am becoming a person of some importance at last. I get a bang on the head in the street, have my room burglarized, am made expert accountant on a fool hunt, and have an escort on my way to lunch. I wonder what will happen next?"

While Jack was out to lunch, Mr. Samuel Ball sat at his desk reading copies of all the dispatches which had been sent out from the house that morning!

CHAPTER III.

MYERS SEES A GHOST.

There was nothing homelike about the room.

It was an ordinary "furnished apartment," and was situated on Clark street, not far from the Polk street depot. There were two persons in the room, one of whom was Mr. Samuel Ball, the new man at Wyman & Bliss' establishment.

The other was a tall, muscular, regular-featured man not far from thirty years of age. Copies of the telegrams which had, on the previous day, passed between Nick Carter, in New York, and Jack Mather, in Chicago, lay open on the table.

The hands of a small clock pointed to the hour of ten.

Outside, the night was cold and stormy.

"And so," said Ball, nervously, "Nick Carter will be here to-night, and then the music will begin."

The speaker's companion sprang to his feet and paced the floor excitedly.

"Everything went well," he said, "until that fool Mather took it into his head to interfere."

"Look here, Colonel," said Ball, coolly, "Mather did what any man of sense would have done. The fault was in labeling that pet of yours 'Nick Carter,' and sending him out to keep Barnes quiet."

"What else could we do?" demanded the Colonel, angrily.

"I don't pretend to say what we should have done."

There was a moment's silence, and then the man who had been addressed as Colonel pointed to the clock.

"Nick Carter is due here at 10:50," he said.

"Yes," was the reply, "and you'll have to call in your counterfeit Nick Carter at once if you have not already done so."

"Not necessarily."

"Why not?"

"All we have to do is to keep the real Nick Carter and Fred Barnes apart," said the Colonel.

"It can't be done."

"We shall see," retorted the Colonel.

The Colonel folded up the papers and put them away.

"The people who come here must not see them," he said.

Then he turned to Ball and asked:

"This man Mather? How does he act?"

"Oh, he sits around and looks ugly and mysterious by turns."

"Takes the books home nights, does he?"

"Certainly."

"Then we can arrange that little surprise party at any time?" asked the Colonel.

"I presume so."

"And the young man expects Nick Carter to walk into the office in the morning and ask for him?"

"Yes."

"Well, we'll see that he doesn't."

"How are you going to prevent it?" asked Ball.

The Colonel laughed.

"Nick will arrive at the Polk street depot at 10:50," he said, "if the train is on time. He will be disguised as a bunco steerer looking for suckers."

Ball gazed at his companion in open-eyed amazement.

"How do you know all this?" he asked.

"I had copies of the telegrams, didn't I? Well, the New York end of the old brotherhood did the rest."

"Then the Crescents still exist in New York?"

"To some extent, yes."

"Nick Carter smashed them here."

The Colonel frowned.

"But there are half a dozen of us doing good work yet, I take it," he said.

"Rather."

"There is more money in one of the schemes we are working now than in a dozen of the old-time jobs," said the Colonel.

"There's one thing you never told me," said Ball, "and that is who played the highwayman that night?"

"That's a secret."

"You know that he got hit, I presume?"

"Yes, and an ugly wound it is, too," was the reply.

The two men talked for a long time, and then the Colonel arose and opened the door.

"We ought to be hearing from the depot," he said, "the train has been in at least half an hour."

"You have men waiting there for Nick?"

"Of course," was the reply.

"I'll go you ten they don't find him."

"Done. Here they come now."

"Who was at the depot?" asked Ball.

"Reed and Myers."

Then came a soft knock at the door.

The Colonel opened it, and two men stepped inside.

"Well," said the Colonel, pointing to a couple of chairs, "you got the New York man all right?"

The men looked at each other and remained silent.

"Come," said the Colonel, "why don't you answer my question?"

"We didn't find him," said one of the men, shortly.

"Did he find you?" demanded the Colonel, in seeming anger, but Ball could see that he was greatly amused at something.

"I'm afraid he did, sir," was the reply. "We thought we were followed from the depot, and went a long way out of our course to make sure."

"Well?"

"We were followed all the way."

"By whom?"

"A sleeping-car porter."

"That," said the Colonel, "was probably the man you were sent to watch."

"Well, we watched him."

"I should think you did. Where did you leave him?"

"He left us."

"Then you don't know where he is?"

"No."

The Colonel gave the men some money and laughed heartily.

"I win my ten," said Ball.

The Colonel threw himself into a chair and laughed heartily.

"Wait a minute," he said.

At that instant a knock came on the door.

Again the Colonel opened the door, but this time only one man entered.

"It worked," said the new-comer.

"Where did you leave Nick Carter?" asked the Colonel.

"Down here in a restaurant eating pie."

"How is he dressed?"

"Nigger sleeping-car porter."

"Regulation uniform?"

"Yes."

"That's all. You know where to wait?"

"Of course."

The fellow went away, and the Colonel turned to Ball again.

"Now's your chance," he said.

Ball looked at his companion in wonder.

"Go down and let him know you are from Wyman & Bliss. Ask him something about the passengers on the train in order to get him to talking. He'll do the rest."

Ball shivered at the very idea of tackling the famous Nick Carter in that way.

"See how easy he got onto Reed and Myers," he said. "What chance do I stand with a man like that?"

The Colonel laughed heartily again.

"It was a put-up job," he said.

"How?"

"I sent this last man down on the train to put him on."

"You did?"

"Certainly."

Ball looked disgusted.

"The man didn't tell me how it was done," said the Colonel, "but I can tell you, for all that."

"Well?"

"Steve goes down on the train and finds Nick according to the description telegraphed from New York. He tells him that he is with Wyman & Bliss, and that he is looking for a New York detective that he wants to see before he reaches the depot, on account of the thugs being after the fly copper. See?"

"Yes."

"Nick keeps his mouth shut, of course, and when the train gets in, Steve points Reed and Myers out to him. He follows them off. See?"

"But I don't see any sense in all this."

"Isn't it easier to get Nick within reach by having him follow our men than by having them follow him wherever he chose to go?"

"It would be with any ordinary man, but don't you suppose that Nick Carter is on bigger than a mountain?"

"I don't think he is."

"You'll find out before long that you have made a mistake."

"Pshaw! Only for my plan Nick would be snugly tucked in bed now, where it would be impossible for us to reach him. I had to give him something to do in order to keep him awake."

"Well, you'd better vacate this room right away."

"Why?"

"Nick probably followed one of the men up here."

"You are becoming humorous," said the Colonel. "Look here."

As he spoke, the Colonel opened a side and stepped into a room adjoining the one in which the conversation had taken place.

When Ball followed him in he closed the door and drew aside a heavy curtain.

There were several quite large holes in the wall separating the two rooms.

"He certainly will follow them up," whispered the Colonel, "and when he does he will be shot down like a dog."

"You are desperate."

"Look at my hands," hissed the Colonel, "scarred and torn with the work they made me do in that accursed penitentiary where he sent me. No wonder I am desperate."

"Your scheme seems to be all right, after all. I did not know that you meant murder."

"That is just what I do mean. Hush, here comes some one now."

The footsteps in the hall stopped at the door of the first room, and there was a knock on the panel.

The Colonel opened the door.

"Hello, Reed," he said, "I thought you had quit for the night."

"Where's Myers?" asked the new-comer.

"He went away with you. You ought to know."

"I lost him, and I thought perhaps he came back here."

Ball stepped into the room and stood by the Colonel's side for a moment.

"Ask him about the chase Nick gave them," he said.

"Never mind now," said the Colonel. "He's been drinking. Let him go to bed."

Ball stepped closer to the visitor.

"What have you been doing to yourself since you left here?" he demanded. "You hardly look like the same man."

The Colonel sprang forward with an oath.

"It isn't Reed at all," he shouted.

Both men reached for their weapons, but the visitor had them covered before they could get their hands to their pockets.

"Well, what do you want here?" demanded the Colonel, sullenly.

"That's a pretty question for an escaped convict to ask Nick Carter!"

The Colonel was now white and trembling.

"You are mistaken," he said.

"How could I be mistaken in the man who formerly headed the Crescent Brotherhood, especially when I had the good fortune to furnish the proof that sent him up for twenty years?"

The Colonel began to move backward toward the wall.

At that instant steps sounded in the hall.

Then a knock came on the door.

Nick Carter moved away and called out:

"Come in."

It was Myers who looked in the next moment.

He gave a cry of terror as he saw the figure by the door, and almost fell to the floor, so great was his fright.

"Don't talk to it," he shouted, turning toward the Colonel. "It's Reed's ghost. I saw him killed in a saloon, and saw the officers take the body away."

"It's a pretty healthy ghost," said Nick, motioning the fellow inside the room.

"Come, Colonel," he added, "come along

and serve the remainder of that term. I have a little work to do in Chicago, and I don't want to be bothered."

With a fierce oath the Colonel sprang back to the wall.

Nick fired, but his bullet, for once, went wide of its mark.

The Colonel pressed a button in the wall, and then sprang toward the detective.

Before Nick could fire again, Myers had him by the arm.

The struggle was a desperate one.

Nick's revolver was dropped in the scuffle, and he had only his fists with which to protect himself against three men.

He struck out right and left, moving toward the door as he did so.

He saw that the arrest could not be made at that time.

As he reached the door some one opened it from the other side.

Two men stood on the threshold.

One of them went down under a terrific blow, but the other clung to the detective in response to repeated calls from the Colonel.

Nick could not break away from the fellow, and those in the rear were fast closing in upon him.

More than one weapon was in sight.

Nick lifted the struggling man, and held him in front of himself.

Then he backed half-way down stairs and dropped him over the railing.

When the Colonel and his friends got to the street entrance, the detective was nowhere in sight.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW SYSTEM OF KEEPING BOOKS.

"If you don't mind, I'll take that package now, and also what little cash you have about you."

Jack sprang back and held the precious parcel between himself and the highwayman.

He had a revolver in his pocket, but it was impossible for him to get it out.

The heavy package in his hands contained the books of the firm, upon which he had been ordered to work nights.

Their loss meant ruin to the young man.

He started to cry out, but was stopped by the gleaming barrel of a revolver pressing against his face.

"One word," hissed the masked robber, "and you die right here."

It was early in the evening, and the streets were well lighted.

Jack had left a Garfield avenue car at Fremont street and turned south toward Center street, only a block away.

On the right were the grounds of a German school and the dark walls of a church.

Across the street the lights of many tenements shone out upon the pavement, but for the moment the street seemed to be deserted.

For an instant the two men stood facing each other in silence.

Jack knew that it was death to cry out.

The robber knew that to make a move at that time meant capture, or, at best, a fight with an armed officer.

For during that little space of time an officer in uniform passed along Garfield avenue, within fifty feet of the spot where the highwayman and his victim were standing.

"Now," said the highwayman, as the patrolman passed along out of hearing, "unload and make tracks."

"This package can be of no use to you," said Jack, "for it contains the books of the firm I work for."

"I'll give you half a minute to drop the bundle and give up your money and watch."

Two men turned from Center street and walked toward the scene of the robbery on Fremont street.

"Unel!"

Jack dropped the package and threw his watch and purse on the walk.

"Now, go!"

The young fellow started down the street toward the advancing men on a run, crying out that he had been robbed, and that the thief might yet be taken.

The men quickened their steps.

The highwayman whirled around the corner of the church to where a light wagon stood on Garfield avenue.

Throwing the package into the wagon, he sprang into the vehicle, seized the reins from a man who occupied one end of the seat, and drove away with a rush.

By this time Jack and the two men had reached the corner of the streets.

As the light wagon rattled up the road they fired several shots at the occupants, and at the horse, but none of them seemed to take effect.

The firing attracted the attention of the patrolman who had recently passed the spot, and he came rushing back.

A baker's wagon was passing, and he pressed it into service.

For a few moments he gave a hot chase, but the rattling vehicle, with its badly handicapped horse, was no match for the fleet-footed animal which drew the highwayman's vehicle.

At the corner of Southport and Webster avenues all trace of the bold robbers was lost.

Jack was nearly heart-broken at the loss of the books.

"They will say it was a put-up job," he said to the officer.

"How can they say that?" demanded the official.

"Because the affairs of the firm are under investigation," was the reply.

"Well," said the officer, "come to the station and make your statement of the affair."

Jack was soon closeted with Lieutenant John Stift, the officer in charge of the North Halsted street station.

"A month ago," said the officer, "we would have thought this robbery a very bold one, but they are becoming very common now, although this is the first one that has taken place in my district."

"Do you think there is any hope of recovering the books?" asked Jack.

"They may throw them away, or hold them for a reward," replied the officer.

Jack went away feeling decidedly blue.

The day had been a disappointing one.

First, Nick Carter had not shown up.

The young man did not even know whether the celebrated detective had reached the city the night before, as per agreement.

Next, Ball had been in a savage mood all day, and had scolded and frowned at everybody around the office.

The new manager had started at the slightest sound, and had sat during all the business hours of the day with his eyes on the door.

Jack knew that something unusual was expected, but he had said nothing in regard to the matter.

Mr. Bliss had not returned, and things were in a muddle generally.

And then Jack had been followed, as before, whenever he left the office for a moment.

He had not seen Fred since morning, and had no means of knowing what the counterfeit Nick Carter was doing.

On the whole, Jack felt like leaving the city and getting out of the whole affair.

In the meantime, the highwayman was making his way northward at a high rate of speed.

"That was a close call," he said, turning to his companion.

The man thus addressed simply nodded.

"You needn't wear your hat in that way any longer," said the robber, pointing to his companion's soft hat, which was pulled well down over his face. "We are out of danger now, and that sort of thing only attracts attention."

"I don't know about our being out of danger."

The highwayman drew up on the reins and looked his companion full in the face.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded.

"Nuthin'."

"Lost your voice?"

"Don't you hear me a-talkin'?"

"Well, you talk mighty funny."

"Caught cold waitin' in that wind," said the other. "How much longer you goin' to drive?"

"You're a fool, Ted," said the highwayman, with an oath, "you know where we've got to go."

"Why don't you go there, then?" demanded the other.

"Wait until I leave these books down here for the Colonel," was the reply. "What he wants of them I don't know, but he wants them bad enough to give up a century, and that's all I care to know about it."

"Where's the Colonel?"

"Home."

The highwayman was not inclined to talk about the Colonel.

"Goin' there?"

"No."

"Where then?"

"Back to the office."

"Can't get in."

"Well, we can find the gang, can't we?"

"I suppose so."

"I believe you're drunk," said the highwayman. "If I had known you had a 'still' on I wouldn't have taken you with me."

"I'm all right."

The highwayman stopped the horse and sprang to his feet.

"You're a cheat," he said, reaching for his pistol.

His companion sat in the seat and stared stupidly up at him.

"What d'ye mean?" he demanded.

"You're no more Ted Smith than I am," said the robber. "Take off that hat and throw back your coat."

The fellow did as requested.

The highwayman fairly howled with rage.

"What have you done with Ted?" he demanded. "Why are you here in his clothes?"

The robber reached for his gun again, but there was a grasp on his arm which held it as if in a vise.

"Let go," he said, more calmly, "or it will be the worse for you. How did you come here?"

"In the wagon."

"This is no time to joke," said the robber. "How long have you been in the wagon?"

"I got in at the corner of Garfield and Fremont, while you were robbing that young man."

"What do you want?"

"You."

"You are modest. Anything else?"

"The books."

"Let go my arm," demanded the highwayman again.

The hold was not released.

The robber struck out wildly.

The blow did not land, and, exerting all his strength, he threw himself upon the unknown man before him, and tried to hurl him from the vehicle.

The struggle was as fierce as it was brief.

The highwayman was as a child in the hands of the man he had attacked, and soon lay on the bottom of the wagon, securely handcuffed.

But the struggle had frightened the spirited horse attached to the vehicle, and he was dashing up the road at great speed, with the light wagon bounding this way and that, and threatening to overturn at any moment.

The reins were dragging on the ground.

"I hope he'll kill us both," growled the highwayman, from his uneasy position in the bottom of the bumping wagon.

Instead of replying, the unknown walked coolly out on the shafts, and soon had the horse under control.

"You're a brick, whoever you are," said the highwayman, as the horse came to a standstill.

"I'm not ashamed of my name," replied the other.

"What is it?"

"Nick Carter."

"I might have known it."

"Why?"

"No other man could have disguised himself so perfectly, and carried out the scheme with such nerve. See what you did last night."

Nick laughed, as he turned the horse around and started toward the center of the city.

"I have been in such scrapes before," he said, "and I'll have the Colonel yet."

"What did you do with Ted?" asked the highwayman.

"An officer took him to the station."

"I don't see how you got him out of the wagon without his giving a yell."

"I had him by the throat before he had a chance to yell, and in about a second he was on his way to the station, and I had on his hat and coat."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Lock you up," replied Nick.

"On what charge?"

"That depends on how you behave yourself," was the answer.

"What do you want?"

"I want to play this game out with the Colonel and his gang, to say nothing of the man who has taken my name, without their knowing of this little incident."

"And in case you had a little help?" asked the prisoner, anxiously.

"Then," replied the detective, "I think I might make the charge disorderly. That is, if you don't help me the way you did last night."

After a long talk with the captive highwayman, Nick left the horse and wagon at the place where the robber had agreed to leave it, turned the prisoner over to an officer and went away with the books.

CHAPTER V.

NICK CARTER'S DOUBLE.

On the night Jack Mather was relieved of the books of the firm so unceremoniously, the night watchman at the great establishment owned by Wyman & Bliss received notice that the office would be occupied until a late hour, and that he need not include that apartment in his rounds.

The watchman went away grumbling.

He had been with the house a great many years, and had never before known the workers in the office to turn night into day.

He did not like to see any deviation from the old order of things.

Besides, if the people in the office kept about the place all night, he would have to keep sober.

Perhaps this was the real reason why he went away grumbling.

But the force employed in the office that night was not a large one.

In fact, there were only two men there when the watchman peeked in at nine o'clock.

One was Manager Ball and the other was his friend, the Colonel.

The watchman had never seen the Colonel before, and did not approve of his appearance.

The two men were sitting close together, and speaking in very low tones, so the watchman could not hear a word they said.

"And there is no record of his arrest?"

It was the Colonel who asked the question.

"Not the slightest," replied Ball.

"The man may be dead."

"Even in that case there would be a record, for Myers says that he was taken away from the saloon by the police."

"Well," suggested the Colonel, in a moment, "perhaps he escaped."

"I don't believe it," said Ball. "It is some of Nick Carter's work. He got into business about as soon as he reached the city, didn't he?"

The two plotters had been trying all day to solve the mystery hanging over the disappearance of the man Reed, but the matter was as big a puzzle as ever to the anxious men.

"And you really think Nick Carter got hold of Reed's coat and hat last night, and walked into my room?" asked the Colonel.

"I am sure of it," was the reply.

"You may be right," said the Colonel. "We know that he is in the city," he added, with a smile.

"And now the question comes up," said Ball, "as to where he has kept himself all day."

"He has not been walking around for his health," said the Colonel.

"You may be sure of that," replied Ball.

"You expected him here to-day?" asked the Colonel.

"Certainly, but he didn't show up."

"He may come to-morrow," said the Colonel.

The men plotted and schemed until ten o'clock, and then the sharp ring of the tele-

phone bell caused them to spring to their feet.

Ball went to the machine.

"What is it?" he asked.

The Colonel stood close by with an anxious look on his face.

"It is from the North Halsted street police station," said Ball, in a moment, "and they report the robbery of one of our clerks."

The look on the Colonel's face now was one of triumph.

"It worked, then," he said.

"Yes," said Ball. "It worked, but——"

"But what?"

"But it was a close call. The officers think they know the robber."

"They always say that," said the Colonel. "They draw pay for telling lies."

"And letting folks escape from the penitentiary," suggested Ball.

The Colonel frowned.

"No more of that!" he said.

"Well," resumed Ball, "there's another man out of our way."

"I see," replied the Colonel, "and there's another link in the chain we are making for young Barnes."

"Of course he hired some one to rob him," said Ball, with a laugh, "in order that he might get rid of the books and so protect his friend and himself."

"Of course he did," grinned the Colonel; "at least that is the way it will appear to the members of the firm."

"We seem to be getting along all right in spite of Nick Carter," said Ball.

"They are late in reporting the robbery," said the Colonel. "It probably took place as early as seven o'clock."

"And Myers ought to have been here with the books before now," suggested Ball.

"It's confounded dry here," observed the Colonel, after a short silence. "Suppose we go up and go out after a lunch?"

Ball gathered up a lot of papers lying on the desk, pushed them carelessly into his pocket, and started away.

As the men passed out, a figure moved from a dark corner near the doorway and slouched up the street.

"Who was that?" demanded the Colonel, with a start.

"Some tramp," said Ball.

"I don't know about that. Wait and see where he goes."

The figure they were watching staggered up to a doorstep and sat down in plain view.

"There," said Ball, with a laugh, "are you satisfied now? A man with mischief in his mind wouldn't choose a place like that to rest in, would he?"

"I think not."

The two men walked on up the street, and the figure they had watched glided back to the door they had just left.

There was a little jingle of keys and then the door swung open.

Nick Carter, fresh from the capture of Myers, was in a fair way to learn something about Manager Ball and his friend, the Colonel.

He paused for a moment at the desk occupied by Ball and made a hasty examination of its contents, finding nothing of importance.

Then he heard steps in the long warehouse-like room behind the offices, and hastily concealed himself in a closet.

The watchman came in, cursed the two men roundly for not turning the lights out, and went away, leaving the room in darkness, except for the small gas jet burning in front of the vault.

The detective crept out of his hiding-place and began to look about for a more desirable place of concealment.

In one corner of the room were two curtain-top desks of large size, which had been placed back to back.

Nick looked into the open space between the drawers and found that the back of each desk had been removed, so far as the foot alley was concerned, leaving an opening about eight feet long.

The place was not the most comfortable in the world, but Nick had been in many worst hiding-places, and he crawled into this one with the air of a man who had found a prize.

He was hardly out of sight when the watchman again entered the room and turned up the light.

Then he went to the vault door and gave the knob a turn.

The door swung open.

The vault was an old-fashioned one, and no time lock had been put in, there being merely the usual combination lock.

The watchman stood for a moment like one bewildered by a sudden blow.

"There is something wrong here to-night," he muttered. "The gas was not left burning for nothing, and now I find the vault door open."

He closed the door and turned the knob so as to set the combination. Then he turned down the gas again and went away.

The detective, lying in his cramped quarters under the desks, was not a little disgusted at what had taken place.

He knew that the watchman would now keep his eye on the office all night.

Nick wanted the field to himself.

He did not dare to take the watchman into his confidence, and so he reasoned that he might have a battle with him before morning.

At the end of half an hour the front door opened, and three men entered.

One was the Colonel, and one was Ball, but who was the third man?

"Hello!" said the Colonel, "some one has been here. We left the gas burning."

"That fool of a watchman, probably."

As he spoke, Ball glanced around to see that the window shades were closely drawn, and then turned up the lights.

Then Nick had a good view of the third man.

He gave a start of surprise as his eyes rested on the fellow.

The third man was made up to represent Nick Carter as he appeared when least disguised!

Just so had the famous New York detective looked that very day as he moved about the city.

After studying his "double" for a few moments, Nick recognized in him a young detective who had occasionally assisted him in unimportant cases in New York.

"Well," said the Colonel, "have you seen anything of Nick Carter to-day?"

"Not a thing. I don't believe he is in the city."

"What about the Reed incident last night?"

"That looked like Nick's work."

"Did you get the books?" asked Ball.

"The books were not there."

"And Myers? Have you seen him?"

"I have not. He did not keep his appointment with me."

"I'm afraid there's something wrong," said the Colonel.

"There may be," said Ball. "At any rate, we'd better work this joint to-night, and then we'll be all right, no matter what takes place."

As he spoke, Ball went to the vault and turned the knob.

He started back with an oath.

"It's locked," he said.

"Have you the combination?"

"No. I did not want it until after this haul."

"Well," said the Colonel, "we can saw through that door in three minutes."

"But that won't leave Mather in the hole for leaving the vault door open, will it?" asked Ball, angrily.

"No," was the reply, "but it will give us the contents of the vault, won't it?"

"Well, let's get away, and give Nick No. 2 a chance to work," said Ball. "It will soon be morning."

Nick could not help but admire the audacity of the fellows.

He now understood at least a part of the job they had put up on Barnes and Mather, although he had not yet heard a word from either of the young men.

He saw how Ball had worked himself into the confidence of the firm.

He understood that from the first robbery had been the leading idea of the scheming manager.

In a moment Ball turned out all the lights and went away, accompanied by the Colonel.

Nick was left alone in the office with his double.

The double at once went to work on the vault door.

He handled his tools with all the skill of a trained burglar.

Nick waited for some moments in silence, and then stealthily approached his double.

So intent was he on watching the work going on that he did not hear the cautious footsteps of the watchman as he approached the door opening into the office from the rear room.

The door swung noiselessly on its hinges, and the next instant a pistol was aimed at the great detective.

A sharp report followed, and Nick fell to the floor, the blood dripping from a wound in his head.

The man at the vault sprang up with a revolver in his hand.

But he was not quick enough.

The watchman fired again, and the burglar dropped.

Then the street door was thrown open, and Ball and the Colonel sprang into the room.

"What is it?" demanded the former.

The watchman pointed to the two men lying on the floor in the dim light.

"Burglars," he said, stepping toward the door.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Ball.

"Call the police."

"Wait."

Ball lit the gas and bent over the detective.

Then he beckoned the Colonel to his side, and the two men held a short conversation in whispers.

"You needn't mind," said Ball, in a moment; "we will get a hack and take them to the station."

The Colonel ordered a carriage, and Nick and his double were taken away, both still unconscious.

The carriage was driven toward the north side.

"At last," said the Colonel, "we have the famous Nick Carter down fine. That means another man out of our way."

"What shall we do with him?"

"Do with him?" echoed the Colonel. "Wring his neck."

"I'd like to wring that watchman's neck."

"Why?"

"For stopping the work on the vault. What will Wyman say when this matter is reported, and there are no prisoners at the police station to correspond with the ones that we took away from his store?"

"We'll have to report that they escaped."

"Too thin."

But just then something happened which caused the two men to drop the subject.

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE WHEELS.

"Say, young feller, you want to hear about dat tin you lost?"

Fred Barnes paused in his rapid walk on Dearborn street and looked his questioner in the face.

The fellow had an evil face, but he was fairly well dressed.

"What do you know about it?" Fred asked, in astonishment.

"Oh, I heard about it," was the reply.

"Can you help me to recover the money?"

"Sure."

"When will you begin?"

"Right now, if you say so," was the reply.

"I am ready."

"I want some stuff first."

"How much do you want" asked Fred.

"Ten will do to start with."

Fred took out a roll of bills and handed the fellow the amount asked for.

The stranger's eyes brightened at the sight of the money, and then he stood for a moment as if thinking seriously.

The fellow was a familiar of the Colonel's, and had expected to get a small sum from Fred and then dodge away in the crowd and leave him.

He changed his mind when he saw the roll of money.

His idea now was to get it all.

For a moment he could think of no plan by which this might be accomplished.

"Come," said Fred, "I am anxious to be at work. If you know anything about the matter, tell me at once."

The fellow's eyes brightened again.

He had found a plan which he thought would work.

"You'll have to go with me," he said.

"Where to?"

"The World's Fair grounds."

Fred hesitated.

Then he started away with the fellow, who said his name was Tom Deering.

The two young men walked down Dearborn street to Randolph, and then turned toward the suburban station of the Illinois Central Railway.

Neither one of them noticed a boyish figure trailing along in the rear.

When they got into the car the shadow occupied a seat just behind them.

He seemed, however, to be paying no attention to the men in front.

Tom and his companion got off at the Woodlawn station.

After leaving the train, the young men walked east on Sixty-third street.

The nearest entrance to the grounds was at Sixty-second street.

On the north a big vacant lot stretched to Sixtieth street.

The northern end of this piece of prairie, and the long western side, are covered with a thick growth of scrub oak.

The locality is a tough one.

A gang of thugs, shell-workers, and highwaymen hold undisputed possession of the territory, and their crimes are of almost daily perpetration.

Even the Columbian guards, on duty at the gates, have been robbed and beaten.

The old Randolph street viaduct gangs of shell-workers and lead pipe men are here in all their glory.

But Fred knew nothing of the nature of the locality.

He was so intent on getting his money back that he thought of nothing else.

"We may as well take a short-cut to de gate," said Tom, turning off from Sixty-third street.

The boyish-looking fellow who had followed the men from Dearborn street started

for the woods at a brisk walk, keeping some distance to the west.

After Fred and his companion passed the edge of the woods they came upon three young men.

One of them was trying to hide a little pea under three shells.

The other two were trying to guess where it was.

In this they were remarkably successful.

They won the manipulator's money every time.

Fred's companion stopped, and of course Fred stopped with him.

"Dat's dead easy," said Tom, taking out the ten-dollar bill Fred had given him.

"Don't bet," said Fred. "It's a scheme."

"It's a cinch," whispered Tom. "I've worked dat game meself, an' dat mug don't know his business."

"Do you know him?" asked Fred.

"Naw. He don't berlong to de gang. He's some fresh mug from de slashin's wot's come here to work de fair."

"Well, I wouldn't bet."

"See dem fellers do him! He'll walk home, dat chump will."

As he spoke Tom threw down his ten-dollar bill.

"I'll bet half of it," he said.

He won.

Then he bet ten and won again.

"Dead easy," he said, turning to Fred, with a grin. "Try it."

Then he bet twenty and won for a third time.

"Make a little easy money," he said to Fred.

After much urging, Fred consented to bet one dollar, more to please his friend than anything else.

He took out a roll of bills and began running them over in search of a small one.

In a moment Fred felt the roll snatched from his hand.

He turned in time to see Tom, with the money still in his hand, making for the thick woods to the west.

He drew a revolver and fired.

Then he started on a run after the thief, crying out at the top of his voice.

Before he had gone a dozen feet he was seized by one of the shell-workers.

"Let me go," shouted Fred, "I must recover that money."

His captor threw back his coat, displaying a policeman's badge.

"I'm an officer," he said, "and you are all under arrest for the crime of gambling. I have been laying for this gang a long time."

"If you are an officer," said Fred, "follow that man and get my money back."

"Give me that gun."

Fred handed it over.

"Now," said the sham policeman, "you come along with me."

The fellow actually started toward the railway station with the young man.

He was certain that he would make a dash for liberty before they reached the station.

But Fred had no such idea in his mind.

They had proceeded but a short distance when a peculiar call came from a thicket but a short distance away.

The sham officer stopped a moment and then turned back.

"My brother officer is in trouble out there," he said, 'an' I'm goin' to help him. You stay here."

The next moment they heard a pistol shot. The fellow dashed away.

Fred followed on behind, thinking that the disturbance might in some way aid him in the recovery of the stolen money.

In a little open space in the woods two men were fighting desperately.

One of the combatants was the fellow who had given the name of Tom Deering.

Fred sprang forward and clutched him by the throat.

"Give me my money," he shouted.

The counterfeit officer sprang up to pull the young man away.

His hands had barely touched the shoulder of the young man who had followed the party from Dearborn street when he received a blow on the throat which settled him for an hour or two at least.

Seeing the fate of his companion, the thief tried to break away and make his escape.

Failing in this, he endeavored to again use his revolver.

The stranger released his hold for a single instant.

The bunco man started to run.

But he did not get far away.

When at arm's length from his antagonist he received a blow under the ear which stretched him at full length on the ground.

The stranger bent over the motionless figure and felt in all his pockets.

When he arose again he had in his hand the roll of bills which had been taken from Fred.

"I saw him take this money from you," he said, handing the young man's property to him, "and therefore I have a right to return it to you. Don't monkey with the shell game again."

Fred looked at his new-found friend with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Where have I seen you before?" he asked.

"You might have seen me at almost any time during the past twenty-four hours, when you wasn't asleep," was the laughing reply.

"I think I saw you in a restaurant this forenoon," said Fred, "only you looked different then."

"I presume so."

"Will you give me your name?"

"Chick."

"What? You are not——"

"Nick Carter's assistant?• Indeed I am."

"And you have been following me for two days?"

"Certainly."

"Will you tell me why?"

"We are after Nick Carter's double."

"But Nick Carter has been helping me."

"His double has been playing you into the hands of your enemies."

"Impossible."

"This is no place to discuss the point," said Chick, looking at his watch. "We must get up town. We'll leave these thugs lying here."

Half a dozen rough looking men stood on the steps of the little railway station when the detective and his friend reached that place.

Chick stood on the edge of the platform when the train dashed up.

When the locomotive was but a few feet away he was given a sudden push from behind.

A cry of horror arose from the people waiting for the train as he fell upon the track, directly in front of the train.

Fred was about to spring after him, but some one held him back.

Then the locomotive rushed by the platform, and the engineer and fireman sprang from the cab to assist in gathering up the mangled body of the man they had seen almost under the wheels.

Faint with the horror of the affair, Fred dropped into a seat and pointed to a group of rough looking men just leaving the place.

"They did it," he said.

At that instant a cry of surprise came from beyond the train.

CHAPTER VII.

NICK BECOMES A BURGLAR.

Nick Carter had heard every word Ball and the Colonel had said after entering the carriage.

His wound was not a serious one.

His double, too, seemed to be regaining consciousness.

"They think the report of my escape will be too thin, do they?" thought the detective. "Well, we'll see about that."

Nick knew that his assistant was not far away, and wondered that he had not made his presence known before.

Chick, almost by a miracle, had escaped being crushed beneath the wheels of the locomotive, and, accompanied by Fred, whom, as stated, he had been shadowing for two days, had proceeded to the office of the firm, which was just closing for the night.

He had been out after Nick Carter's double ever since he had been in the city, while Nick himself had devoted most of his attention to the Colonel and Ball and their schemes.

He had followed Jack to the place where the robbery had taken place that night because he had seen the young man shadowed away from the office.

He had gone, however, expecting to meet his double.

The idea that the conspirators would endeavor to strengthen their case by stealing the books Jack had been ordered to take home never entered his mind.

But he had secured the books, and had also caught a glimpse of his double.

Things were shaping themselves nicely.

Nick was a trifle weak from loss of blood, but was as plucky as ever.

He did not consider himself a prisoner

in the hands of what was left of the Crescent Brotherhood.

The nervy fellow figured that he practically had the two leaders in his power.

After going a short distance the carriage stopped.

The Colonel opened the door with an oath and looked out.

He looked straight along the level barrel of a revolver.

Ball was having the same experience on the other side.

The men were desperate.

They both struck out and sprang to the ground.

Then something unexpected happened.

The carriage stopped square on the cable track.

An advancing grip car struck it fair in the rear, and in a moment all was confusion.

Nick sprang away from the overturned vehicle, dragging his double with him.

Chick went to his assistance, and in the confusion the Colonel and his companion in crime escaped.

The double struggled hard to escape, but all his efforts were in vain. Nick had been hunting for him too long to allow him to get away after he had his hands on him.

While the driver of the wrecked vehicle was swearing over the accident, Nick and Chick were talking on the walk.

"Who is your companion?" asked the former, after the incidents of the day had been briefly explained.

"Why," was the reply, "that is the young man who was robbed of the books to-night. I found him mooning around the office when I got here from the South Side."

"And what did you do with Fred?"

"Sent him home. He's all broken up. This fellow, now," he added, pointing to Jack, "is chock full of fight."

"Then we'll take him with us."

"What are you going to do with your prisoner?" asked Chick.

"Turn him over to an officer on a charge of burglary."

Nick had no difficulty in making himself known to a policeman, who promised that the arrest should be kept quiet until further orders.

Then the two detectives and Jack entered a little eating-house on Clark street.

Here Jack went over the details of the twenty-thousand-dollar robbery, and told of his suspicions.

"I have been looking for you for two days," he said, addressing Nick. "I little dreamed that you were in the wagon I was sending my bullets after to-night."

"It's all right," said Nick. "The only thing I regret is that the two leaders got away to-night."

"We'll have them yet," said Chick.

"The remains of the Crescent Brotherhood are playing a double game here," said Nick. "They engineered the robberies and put up the detective scheme all right, but all the time they meant to rob that store."

"What we want," said Chick, "is to find a man with a bullet in his head."

"Exactly."

"And a man who carries a tiny watch-key of a certain pattern, with a small diamond in one end."

"Right you are, Chick."

"And his name begins with B."

"I am not so sure of that."

"Then I am clear off."

"It does not seem to me that Bliss would place himself so completely in the hands of that gang. Why, they would blackmail the life out of him."

"Well, the false detective was on the ground, for no other purpose than to mislead Fred, and the two men were sent there at

once to look after the key the highwayman lost."

"And you say there were only two keys of that description?"

"Only two."

"That makes four men, besides the Colonel and Ball, interested in the robbery from the start—the highwayman, the detective, and the two men who searched for the key in the street and found one like it in the room."

"That does seem like a good many men for a man like Bliss to let into a scheme which, if discovered, would land him in the penitentiary."

"And still," said Nick, "the motive of the robbery was to keep the young man out of the firm, and out of the Wyman family. There can be no doubt of that, and it does look like Bliss."

"The robbery alone would have been sufficient," said Jack.

"You are wrong there," replied the detective. "The conspirators were also bound to ruin the boy in the estimation of Mr. Wyman. That is where the girl part comes in."

"I give it up," said Jack.

"It is a tough case," said Nick, "but——"

The detective stopped short in his talk and fixed his eyes on the door of the little eating-house.

"What is it?" whispered Chick.

"Do you see that old apple woman?"

"Yes."

"It is a man," whispered Nick. "Notice how he walks when he comes this way."

In a moment the old apple woman approached the table where the men were sitting.

"Apples? Apples?" she queried.

Nick threw down a dime.

"Take one, boys," he said. "It's my treat."

But the woman could not make change.

She glanced keenly at the detective and turned toward the door.

The detective winked at his companions and called out after her:

"Never mind the change. Leave us some apples."

The seeming woman mumbled something under her breath and went out.

Nick laughed.

"He forgot to put the apples in the basket when he went out after suckers," he said. "Now, when we go out we'll be followed. You see the Colonel means business."

"Where are you going?" asked Jack, as Nick arose to his feet.

"I'm going to see about that apple seller who leaves her apples at home," was the reply.

"Where shall we meet?" asked Chick, seeing that Nick meant to go out alone.

"Go to the Palmer House and register as Baker and Mott, of New York. You may not see me again for hours."

When Nick got out on the sidewalk, the apple seller stood under the flaring light of a fruit stand only a few feet away.

He passed within two feet of him and walked north on Clark street to the corner of Madison.

The apple seller was not far behind.

Nick ran up the stairs leading to the Press Club rooms, and halted in the back hall.

There was no one about, the place being very quiet at night.

Nick put on a gray wig and beard. In his new rig he looked like a venerable old man.

His toilet completed, he passed down the stairs leading to Madison street, and stood for a moment in the entrance.

The apple seller stood in the little angle formed by the door of the place of business on the corner.

Nick walked out to Dearborn street and hailed a cab.

"You understand trailing people, I sup-

pose, said he, as the driver halted in front of the place where he stood.

"A little."

"Well," said Nick, "I am an officer, and I want to follow the old apple seller who stands down here by the corner."

"All right. Two dollars an hour this time of night."

Nick handed him a five-dollar bill.

"She stands right there by the Putnam Clothing Company's store," he said. "Drive up there and stand as if waiting for a fare until she moves away, then follow her."

"Correct. Get in."

Nick had not long to wait.

The disguised apple seller got tired of standing on the street, and took an "Owl car" for the North Side.

The cab followed on behind.

The man Nick was following got off at the corner of Center and Sedgwick streets and walked east toward Lincoln Park.

Then he turned on North Park avenue and went south.

Nick dismissed the cab at the corner and went on alone.

He was not surprised to see the seeming woman turn in at a very handsome residence.

She had disposed of her basket on the way, and stood on the front steps of the house in the attitude of a servant who had been kept out late and was afraid of the displeasure of her master.

In a moment the door opened, and the man-woman entered.

"Now for a job of burglary," thought the detective, passing down the area steps.

It was well for him that he did so, for he was hardly out of sight under the stone porch when two men, walking hastily from the south, ascended the steps and rang the bell.

The door was opened, and then the detective heard one of the men ask:

"Is Jed here?"

"Just got here," was the reply.

While Nick was wondering whether that was a challenge and reply, the door closed again, and all was still.

Then he applied his pick-lock to the door and soon stood in the little hall running past the dining-room to the kitchen in the back part of the house.

A dim light was burning in the kitchen.

Nick crept up the back stairs and stood in the main hall. A light was burning there, and he could hear the murmur of voices in the rooms above.

He stepped cautiously forward and stood for a moment with his hand on the stair railing.

Then he heard a door close below.

The next moment steps sounded on the stairs, and Nick bounded toward the front part of the hall, where a rack was thickly covered with overcoats.

He concealed himself in the folds of the hanging garments, and the next instant a man passed him and went on up stairs.

Then a door opened above, and he heard a voice:

"Did you get the ice?"

"Yes."

"Well, fix it quick. I'm burning up."

"Yes, fix it quick," said another voice. "He's uglier than a cow with a sore heel. All quiet down stairs?"

"All quiet."

The door closed, and Nick went on up stairs.

At the end of the hall was an open door.

Nick, imagining that the room connected with the one in which the conversation was taking place, entered.

In a moment, however, he saw that he had made a mistake.

The room was only a small sleeping room, and nothing could be seen or heard from it.

He was about to turn away when the ticking of a watch attracted his attention.

He took the watch in his hand and carried it to the open door. There he saw that it was a very fine one, and that attached to it was a costly chain.

And on the chain was a tiny watch-key with a diamond in one end.

Nick put the watch, chain and key into his pocket.

Then a shadow fell on the hall floor in front of him, and he saw a white, angry face looking into his own.

He started back with a cry of astonishment, for the man before him was the Colonel!

CHAPTER VIII.

DRUGGED BY A CIGAR.

Chick and Jack were not destined to have as quiet a time for the remainder of the night as they imagined.

Just as Nick went out three bums entered the little eating-house, and took seats at a table not far from where the detective and his companion were sitting.

Chick recognized one of them as having been on the platform at Woodlawn station.

"There's one of the gang," said the detective, bending toward Jack. "No matter what he says, don't make any reply."

In a very short time the tough's eyes fell upon Chick, who had not in the least changed his personal appearance.

He whispered to his companion and then began to talk in a loud tone.

"You know me," he said. "Well, if I ever git another swipe at dat mug I'll put him to sleep fer all day. He ain't no good, anyway."

"I'd like to see him," said one of the other toughs.

"Why," said the first speaker, squinting in

the direction of Chick, "I believe dat's him now."

Chick made no reply.

"He's on his muscle, he is," continued the tough, "an' I'd like to run him t'rough de mill."

"Did he gib you dat eye?" asked one of the fellow's companions.

"Naw. He can't gib nobody an eye, he can't."

"There's nothing in this," whispered Chick, starting up. "Let's go out."

On the way to the door the two young men had to pass the table where the toughs sat.

One of them caught hold of Jack.

Jack faced him with an ugly look in his eyes.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Wot you goin' to do about it?" sneered the tough.

Jack raised his hand and gave the fellow a blow which sent him rolling on the floor.

In a moment all was confusion in the eating-house.

The fallen man's companions sprang up and attacked both Chick and Jack, and for a moment the fight was a hot one. But superior muscle and training prevailed, and the attacking party was soon knocked out.

"You're a fool, Chuck," said one of the knocked-out men, wiping the blood from his face, "to run up ag'in a couple of prize-fighters."

The little crowd which had gathered around the combatants now dispersed, and Chick and Jack again started for the door.

The tough who had been called Chuck hobbled up to the man in charge of the place, and said a few words to him in a low voice.

"Wot for?" asked the latter.

"Colonel wants 'em."

"Then let 'im git 'em."

"Too tough, eh?"

"Too tough."

"I'll report wot you say."

The proprietor started at the threat and then called out:

"Say, young fellers, you'd better pay fer that supper."

"It is paid for," said Chick.

"Yer a liar."

Chick started toward the place where the fellow stood.

"Come away," advised Jack, "we don't want any more fights to-night. We've had knocking enough for one day."

As Jack spoke he took a silver dollar from his pocket and threw it at the proprietor's head.

The fellow dodged, and the coin went through a small mirror over one of the tables.

"Now you'll pay fer that glass," shouted the proprietor, bounding forward.

"How much?" asked Jack.

"Five dollars."

"It's worth about thirty cents."

"You hand out five dollars, or I'll call in a copper."

"Call him in."

The defeated bums were gathering around again and Chick began to suspect that all the talk was being made for the purpose of delaying their departure from the place.

Seizing Jack by the arm he started for the door.

The proprietor sprang between them and the door, and the toughs closed up in the rear.

Chick struck out and the eating-house keeper went down on his own dirty floor.

Then the detective heard blows behind him, and turned around to Jack's assistance.

He was just in time. Three men were all piling on the young clerk, their evident intention being to get him away from his companion.

"So, that's your game, is it?" said Chick, striking with both hands. "I thought there was something in this besides a cheap row."

But the fellows had had enough of Chick that night, and did not make much of a fight, devoting most of their attention to getting away.

In a short time the detective and his companion were out on the street again, walking north, toward the City Hall.

Just as they reached the "House of David," Jack caught hold of his friend's arm.

"There goes one of the gang," he whispered.

"Where?"

"That man who just came out of the place and went north."

"Who is it?"

"The man Ball I told you about. I wonder what he's doing here."

"Well, we'll have to see what he's up to."

At the corner of Clark and Randolph streets Ball called a cab.

"You join him," said Chick, dropping back into the shadow of the city building, "and see what he'll say to you. He didn't recognize you there by the hack."

"Suppose he wants me to go away with him."

"Then go."

"I'm afraid he did recognize me. Where will you be?"

Chick laughed.

"I shall not be very far behind," he said. "Only keep him there talking until another cab comes within reach. Ah, here comes one now."

Jack walked up to where Ball was standing.

"Going north?" he asked.

"Hello' Mather!" was the reply. "what are you doing out this time of night?"

"I might ask you the same question."

"Very true. Well, I had a little business down town. Do you live on the North Side?"

"Yes."

"How far out?"

"Center street."

"Then have a ride with me. I am just going out."

Jack gazed anxiously up and down the street. Chick was already inside the cab which he had seen a moment before.

"All right," said Jack. "I'm glad of a chance to get home so, for the Owl cars are full of drunken people at this time of night."

Ball appeared to be in excellent spirits, but he was "laying" for Jack.

He knew that Jack had found the New York detective.

Now he thought the cards were in his own hands.

Jack was in his power at last, and would not be likely to tell any more tales to Nick Carter.

Ball lit a cigar and tendered one to Jack.

The young fellow took it without suspicion and began to smoke.

Then he began to feel very sleepy and tired.

In a moment the true state of affairs flashed into his drowsy and fast disappearing mind.

He had been drugged.

He struggled to his feet and tried to stop the vehicle, but, at a cry from Ball, the driver lashed his horse into a run and turned toward the lake, the cab being then on La Salle avenue, a continuation of the La Salle street of the South Side.

Ball seized the young man and pulled him back into his seat.

"You'll fall out if you keep on that way," he said, with a leer.

Jack heard the wheels of the cab in the rear advancing rapidly, but Ball heard the noise as well, and called out to his driver to make haste, and not be overtaken.

The chase, which might have been a long one, was brought to a sudden termination by a bullet from Chick's pistol.

The bullet in question passed through the hat of Ball's driver, and that worthy thought best to draw up his horse.

Ball sprang out and drew a pistol as he did so.

"Keep back," he shouted, as Chick advanced upon him, having sprung from his own cab as soon as the vehicle stopped. "I don't propose to be robbed by one man."

But the fellow was not quick enough with his gun. Chick had him covered.

"Drop that gun."

Ball obeyed.

"Now put your hands behind your back."

This was also done.

Then Chick threw a pair of handcuffs to his driver.

"Put them on," he said.

The cabman hesitated, and Chick threw open his coat and disclosed his badge. Then the work was quickly done.

"Now, then," said the detective, "take him down to the Chicago avenue police station and have him locked up on the charge of burglary."

Again the cabman hesitated, but at that moment a policeman in uniform came hurrying down the street, having been attracted by the shot, and, taking him aside, Chick briefly explained the situation of affairs.

"It's all right," said the officer, in a moment, "take him, an' do anythin' else this man tells you to."

The officer turned away, but Chick stopped him.

"Wait," he said, "I want you to hear my talk with this other man, and I want you to see what he has in his cab."

By this time Jack began to wake up and find out that something was going on about him. He crawled out of the cab, rubbing his eyes.

"What did he do?" asked Chick.

"Drugged me with a cigar."

"Why didn't you call out to the cabman?"

"I did, but he drove all the faster, at a call from Ball."

"I knew that before," said Chick, "but I wanted this officer to hear it."

"I'll run him in," said the officer.

"Not yet," said Chick, turning to the cabman.

"I want to see if he'll answer my questions first," continued the detective. "Do you know who your fare is?" he added, to the driver.

"No lies, now," broke in the policeman.

"Yes."

"What's his business?"

"Crook."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Yes."

"Will you drive us there?"

"See here," said the cabman, "I'd like to, but he belongs to a big crowd, and I want to be assured that I'll be protected from them."

"There won't be much left of the gang in a day or two," said the officer.

"You may tell all you know," said Chick, "and you'll be protected."

"Will you give me that same chance?" asked Ball, who had not yet been taken away.

"If you'll give the whole scheme away," said Chick. "I'll do all I can for you."

"That's enough. Step-aside here for a moment."

CHAPTER X.

A MILLIONAIRE HIGHWAYMAN.

For the second time that night Nick Carter and the leader of the band of outlaws were face to face.

Nick looked down at the floor and appeared to tremble violently.

He was certain that the Colonel had not yet recognized him in the "old man" rig which he wore.

"Don't have me arrested," he said. "I was driven to robbery by want. Let me go and I'll reform."

"Yes," replied the Colonel, with a laugh, "you'll reform until you get your fingers on some other man's watch. How did you get in here?"

"Sneaked in at the front door."

"Well, I'll have you searched, to make sure you haven't got any of my property about your person, and let you sneak out of the front door. What do you think of that?"

The detective uttered a string of thanks about a yard long.

The Colonel did not suspect that he had the famous Nick Carter under his roof, and meant to let the old sneak thief go without making him any trouble.

But Nick did not want to be searched. That would spoil the whole scheme, for an examination of his person could not fail to disclose his identity.

The Colonel's companions had left the room where the conversation had been in progress, but Nick still heard the sound of a voice there.

He knew well enough what it meant, and why the ice had been taken into the room.

The man in there was suffering from a bullet wound!

The detective was as positive of the fact as if he had seen the man with his own eyes.

"When I see the fellow who is doing all that kicking," he thought, "I shall see the man who robbed young Barnes."

"What a racket that fellow makes," said the Colonel, with a frown. "Lock this old

fellow up somewhere until I have time to attend to him."

Nick was taken into the very room he had been searching for—the room next to the one where the men were talking.

The Colonel closed the door between the two apartments, but the detective could hear every word spoken, the transom being open.

"What's all that racket?" demanded the grumbler.

"Caught a thief in the house."

"In this house?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's lucky if he gets out with enough clothes to cover his nakedness. What could have induced a thief to come to this house?"

"This house has a very good reputation in the neighborhood," said the Colonel, with a laugh.

"Well, it won't, if things go on like this," was the reply. "The very devil seems to be on deck to-night."

"We'll have to find some other joint," said the Colonel. "We should have had to do that anyway, after those detectives got on."

"You take it mighty coolly, anyway. I wish you had my sore head."

"Fred shot to kill, didn't he?"

"I should say so."

Nick was hardly able to restrain his joy at the discovery he had made.

His suspicions were confirmed.

The actual robber was in the house.

"If I only had a little help," thought Nick, "I could land the gang right here now—that is, the leaders."

At that moment a fierce ring came at the front door.

"Who's there?" Nick heard the Colonel ask, pushing his head out of the door of the room and addressing some one in the lower hall.

"An officer," was the reply.

"Show him up."

"Man with him."

"Show them both up."

"What does it all mean?" asked the wounded man.

"I think it is some of our men in disguise," was the reply.

"But suppose it should not be?"

"Then we'll have to do the best we can."

Nick heard the officer enter the room, and heard the Colonel offer him a chair.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"There are burglars in the neighborhood," said the officer, "and we saw suspicious looking people hanging around this house. We thought it our duty to warn you."

"You did well," was the reply, "and now that you are here you may as well take away a sneak thief we have just found in the house."

The Colonel opened the door and Nick Carter walked out.

Before him Nick saw the Colonel, a gentlemanly appearing man with a bandage about his head, an officer in uniform, and Chick.

The servants and the men who had entered about the time Nick had were in the lower part of the house.

A revolver lay on the table, and the detective picked it up.

"Handcuff these men," he said, turning to Chick and the officer.

"What does this mean?" demanded the wounded man.

"It means," replied Nick, "that you are under arrest for highway robbery. My friend, the Colonel, is under arrest for helping to burglarize your store to-night, and also as an escaped convict."

"Burglarize my store," shouted Bliss. "Who are you?"

"Nick Carter, at your service."

"It's all up, Bliss," said the Colonel coolly; "we did try to rob your store, Ball and I, but this devil stopped us."

Bliss turned his back on the Colonel, and did not speak to him again. He was disgusted at the treachery of the men he had used as tools because they were unscrupulous.

"I'll give you one hundred thousand dollars to let me go," he said to Nick.

"I thought you were in St. Louis," said the detective, without noticing the attempted bribe.

Bliss made no reply.

A scuffle down stairs now proclaimed that the other officers had arrested the men there.

Half an hour later all were at the police station.

Jack had to wake Fred up that night and tell him the good news.

Then Fred had to go to Mr. Wyman's house and tell him, but he did not spend much time with the wealthy merchant. There was another attraction in the house.

The next morning the books were back at the office, and Fred occupied his old desk.

But instead of having a new interest, he had that of Mr. Bliss.

The Colonel went back to prison to serve his time out, and Bliss, Reed, Myers and Nick Carter's double all received fairly long sentences, but much shorter than they would have received only for Nick, who kept his word and recommended them to the mercy of the court, all, except the double.

And before long Nick and Chick each received a piece of wedding-cake, and they never go to Chicago without calling on the prosperous firm of Wyman & Barnes.

And Nick's "double" troubles him no more.

THE END.

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